

RELATED STORIES

PSYCHOLOGY AND RELATIONSHIPS

Harvard-trained psychologist: 5 'red flag' phrases that signal your relationship is over

RAISING SUCCESSFUL KIDS

Why parents should let kids feel anxious, from a child psychologist

RAISING SUCCESSFUL KIDS

Stop telling kids they're bad instead to raise their self-esteem

RAISING SUCCESSFUL KIDS

Parents who are really good at handling tantrums do 5 things—their kids become more emotionally intelligent, says psychologist

Published Sun, Sep 6 2026•9:36 AM EDT



Juli Fraga, Contributor

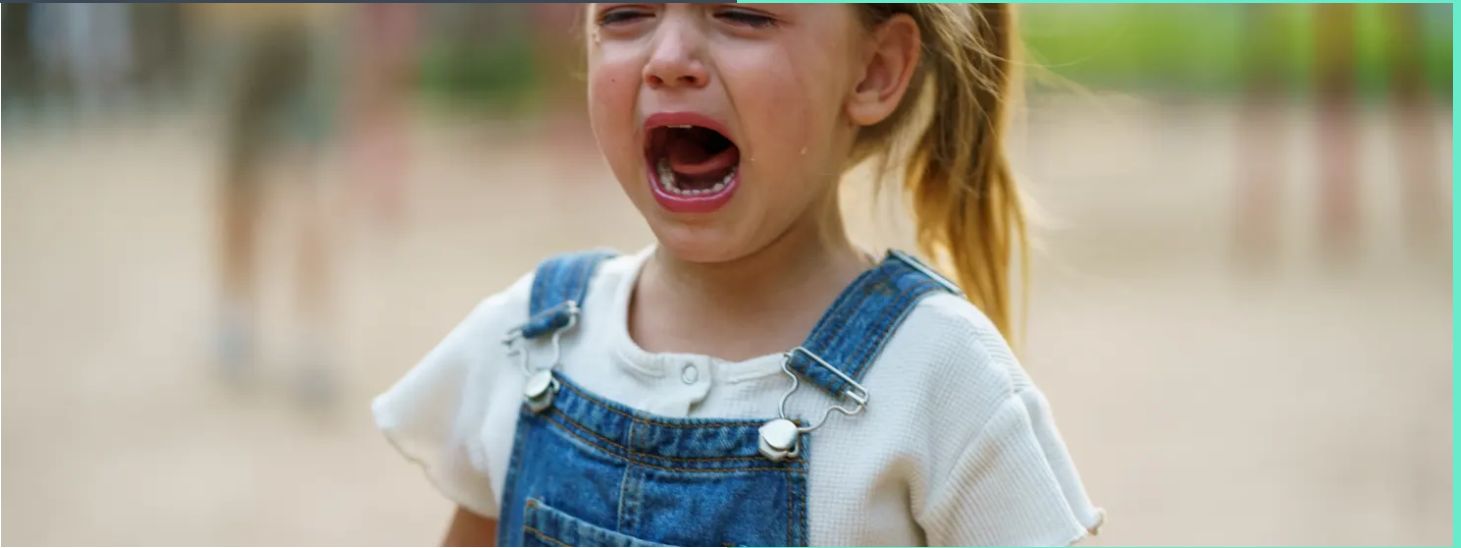
SHARE    

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including your existing data. For info on your data rights, click "Your Privacy Choices" or see "[Your Rights](#)" in our Privacy Policy.

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you previously opted out of selling, sharing, or targeted advertising on this site, you will need to update your Privacy Choice.

Your Privacy Choices

Continue



Stockplanets | E+ | Getty Images

Kids tend to express their emotions in actions. Toddlers scream and hit when they don't get their way. Middle schoolers stomp out of the room when they get angry. Teenagers roll their eyes and slam doors to express frustration or disapproval.

As a psychologist and co-author of “[Parents Have Feelings, Too](#),” I’ve worked with hundreds of parents who feel overwhelmed when their child doesn’t listen, misbehaves or throws tantrums for no discernible reason. Some of them try to negotiate with their children. Others become frustrated and lose their cool. Both approaches can leave parents feeling even more taxed and out of control.

Misbehaving is a normal part of childhood. And it’s a form of

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including your existing data. For info on your data rights, click “Your Privacy Choices” or see “[Your Rights](#)” in our Privacy Policy.

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you previously opted out of selling, sharing, or targeted advertising on this site, you will need to update your Privacy Choice.

Whether your toddler is having a tantrum or your teenager is yelling at you, it's normal to [feel rattled](#) and even lose your cool.

But children learn by witnessing what we do, so try to stay calm amid the chaos. Pause and take five [deep belly breaths](#). This might sound simple, but [deep breathing](#) delivers oxygen to our muscles, which helps elicit the body's relaxation response.

[Emotions](#) are contagious, which means that when parents remain calm, kids “catch” their calm and learn how to regulate their own big feelings.

2. Act like a detective, not a CEO

When kids act up, you may be tempted to tell your child to “knock it off!” Or you might jump into problem-solving mode. But [taking charge](#) can cause kids to shut down and hurt their self-confidence.

Instead of acting like a CEO, approach the situation like a detective. Try to adopt a curious mindset, asking yourself: “What might be going on for my kid right now that’s driving this behavior?”

For example, a child who lies may be afraid of getting into trouble, while a teen who rejects boundaries may want more independence.

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including your existing data. For info on your data rights, click “Your Privacy Choices” or see “[Your Rights](#)” in our Privacy Policy.

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you previously opted out of selling, sharing, or targeted advertising on this site, you will need to update your Privacy Choice.

misdirecting anger — are brilliant ways we protect ourselves from painful emotions.

Defenses temporarily numb potent feelings like shame, guilt or sadness, but they don't help kids "feel and deal" with life's challenges in the long run.

Finding language for our feelings is called "[emotion naming](#)," which helps calm down the brain's amygdala and take the edge off big feelings. Try to help your child name the emotions that their defenses cover up. Simply asking "Are you sad?" "Are you angry?" or "Are you worried?" is a good start.

4. Investigate if your behavior plays a role

Children imitate behaviors that they witness at school and at home. If your child's misbehavior keeps repeating, reflect on your own actions. Ask yourself:

- "How do I cope with my own emotions?"
- "What do I do when I feel angry, sad, anxious or fearful?"
- "Do I use defenses to cope with painful emotions instead of dealing with them?"

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including your existing data. For info on your data rights, click "Your Privacy Choices" or see "[Your Rights](#)" in our Privacy Policy.

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you previously opted out of selling, sharing, or targeted advertising on this site, you will need to update your Privacy Choice.

care or address a problem.

5. Consider how unresolved stress plays a role

Daily as well as prolonged [stress](#) affect the mind and body.

Stressors can rattle a child's nervous system, making it harder for them to regulate their emotions.

As a psychologist, I know that this dysregulation can affect how a child behaves. It's why kids often regress when a new baby is born or when they go through a tough transition. It's also why kids often melt down when they're overtired.

The acronym "[H.A.L.T.](#)" — which stands for hungry, angry, lonely or tired — can help parents pinpoint underlying stressors that may be making it harder for kids to regulate their feelings and leading them to act out.

Try meeting their needs first and see if their behavior shifts. A well-timed snack, nap or quality time can be the perfect reset.

[Juli Fraga](#) is a licensed psychologist with nearly two decades of experience working with new parents. She is a co-author of the book "[Parents Have Feelings, Too.](#)" She also teaches workshops for

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including your existing data. For info on your data rights, click "Your Privacy Choices" or see "[Your Rights](#)" in our Privacy Policy.

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you previously opted out of selling, sharing, or targeted advertising on this site, you will need to update your Privacy Choice.

RELATED STORIES

PSYCHOLOGY AND RELATIONSHIPS

RAISING SUCCESSFUL KIDS

Why parents should let kids feel
anxious, from a child psychologist

RAISING SUCCESSFUL KIDS

Stop telling kids
instead to raise

- Americans are carrying more credit card debt than banks report. Here are 3 things you can do today
- The best tools to build an emergency fund when you live paycheck to paycheck
- Only one in four Americans has a will. Making one is easier than you think
- New student loan rules are giving scammers a new opening. Here's how to protect yourself



Stay in the loop

Get Make It newsletters delivered to your inbox

SIGN UP

About Us

Learn more about the world of CNBC Make It

LEARN MORE

Follow Us



This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including your existing data. For info on your data rights, click “Your Privacy Choices” or see “[Your Rights](#)” in our Privacy Policy.

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you previously opted out of selling, sharing, or targeted advertising on this site, you will need to update your Privacy Choice.